

["In Abraham's Bosom"]

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Approximately 2250 Words.

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SOUTH CAROLINA FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT

CHARLESTON, S. C.

TITLE: "IN ABRAHAM'S BOSOM".

Date of First Writing February 7, 1939

Name of Person Interviewed Emaline Oliver (Colored)

Olace Dillon, S. C.

Address R. F. D. I, Dillon, S. C.

Occupation Field Worker

Name of Writer F. Donald Atwell

Name of Reviser State Office

Project #-1655

The one-room tenant house, like so many in the countryside, was in a sad state of repair. The [interior?] presented as despairing a picture as the exterior.

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"Yassuh! We'se movin' dis Janwary sho." Emaline, black, emaciated, fifty, threw a fat splinter in the fireplace from which most of the bricks had fallen. "We'se been heah 'leben yeahs, an' looks lak we gits deeper in de bog ev'vy yeah. Mister Stoley, dats de man we wucks for tole Tee, dats my boy, dat he mought as well give him de cotton crop [caze?] he warnt gwine meck nothin' er come outen de hole no-how."

"I'se jes about nekkid mahsef, but I kin meck out summers. Hits dose heah gran'chillen. I went down to de relief place whut dey sez gives away clothes an sich truck, to git some rags for de chillen, and de lady whut runs de shebang ax me effen Mr. Stoley doan teck care of his hands, and I tell her, no mam, dat he sho doant."

"Dat lady wuz young and purty, an' when I tole her how I wuz fix, her eyes sorta flash lak, an she sez: 'Dam 'em! Dey wucks dem po' niggers to death in de spring, summer an' fall, an' den loads 'em on us in de winter. Dey's de wuns meckin' money on de guv'ment. An' dey is got de nerve to cuss de relief."

"I declar Mister, dat young lady sho doan took no draggin' offen nobody. I done learnt dat all de niggers an' po buckra loves 2 dat gal mos' to death, cauz she treats everybody right. She sez she gwine see de right done effen hit cos' her her job, but shecks, de couldn't run dat gal off. Dey's too many po' folks whut wud tear down dat jint effen dey did. She sho' is one good 'oman effen she do cusses sumtimes. I bet she wouldn't teck no sassin off'm Mr. Rosy-velt effen he wuz to cum in dere blowin' off. She writ something on a little piece er paper and tole me to teck hit to anuther lady an say she say give me some clothes for dese heah chillen. An' dat lady done hit too. She say you can't fool dat purty young lady whut cuss out de lanloard. Say she jes nat'rally know who need hep an' who doant."

"Mister Stoley he sho is one hard man to wuck for. He turn out de hogs and say let 'em forage aroun' and dey forages right into my collards an et 'em all up. I can't have no gyarden nor nothin' caze de chickens an' cows an' hawgs jes nat'rally stroy evvything I plants. We ain't even got no toilet, caze Mr. Stoley sez day ain't sanitary. De guv'ment man

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cum out heah an sez de relief mens is meckin' some, an' dat he'll put one up back of de house fer ten dollars. Mister Stoley jes laugh an say: 'Let 'em go to de woods lak day been doin'.

"I sho wishes I could git on Mister Rogers place. Dat sho in one good man effen ever dere wuz one. He allus full up caze he so good to he hands. I 'member when my boy, de ol'est one, Ed 3 traded wid him. Ed, he been usta stealin' whut wuz his'n, an' he kinda got de habit. He hadn't been wid Mister Rogers a week fore he stole five bushels er peas an' sole 'em to de filling station up on de highway. When de ole man fine hit out he call Ed to de house early one mawning an' sez right slow lak: 'My niggers doan steal [frum?] me Ed. I treats 'em right, an' I wants to treat you right. I'se gwine look over dis, but doan let hit ever happen agin'.

"Ed, he felt so orney an' mean dat he went an' borrowed de money on he mule, an' bought dem peas back for twice whut dey brought him, an' he took 'em back an' lay de sacks on de back poach an' sez: 'I brung yo' peas back Mr. Rogers.'

"Ed, he lak all de res' now, he jes loves de groun' dat ole man walk on. All de niggers on de place is 'voted to him. One time, de ole man tuck sick an' eevvybody thought he gwine die, an' he thought so too. I could heah dem a-praying an' crying clean over heah. He call all he niggers in an' held each one by de han' an' tell 'em: 'I wants you all to teck care of Miss Lucy effen I die. Teck my share de crop an' de hogs an' put em' in my barns, an' teck yo' share an' put in yore barns jes lak you is allus done.'

"Lawd Gawd, dem niggers jes bust down an' cry. Dey sho wuz 4 some rejoicin' when de ole man pull through. Hit wuz an' act uv providence. I reckon de Lawd sorta reconsidered an' let him stay on to be good to po' folks whut needed him so bad.'

"Mr. Rogers he didn't never go out an' see to his shares gittin put in. 'Cose he watched he business, but he never let nobody know [about?] hit. Why, he'd git clean offen he place on de days dey wuz harvestin'. He sez he jes trus' humanity. An' he sho is prospered too,

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yassuh. He got de finest house, an' de biggest barns, an' de prettiest stock in dis county. He done got rich heppin po' folks.

"Mister Stoley he tell him he gwine go busted messin' up wid niggers an' not lookin' to he business, but Mr. Rogers jes smile kinda sad lak he allus does an' sez: 'I treats my niggers good, Sam. Dey treats me good.'

"An' you know mister, hit warn't long arter dat 'fore Mister Stoley loss a barn wid 1800 bushels er corn in hit. Sumbody set fire to dat barn. I know who done hit too, but I ain't never gonna tell caze Mister Stoley giv'd dat man whut did hit a mighty rough deal, yassuh, dat he did. One yeah all he hogs lak to died wid sumthing. I knowed hit wuz sody put in dey feed. Look lak de more Mister Stoley try to grasp de more he lose.'

"I sho will be proud when I kin git moved outen dis heah shed. Mr. Rogers he keep up he houses, an' dey all painted right pretty.

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A lot of de hands mecks enough to fix up dey own houses, an' dey aint all de time a-runnin' to Mister Rogers fer evvything dey needs. He giv'd each one he tenants a cow las' yeah, an' he mecks 'em all plant a gyarden. He buy de fence wish, an' trus' 'em to pay him back outen de crop. Dey aint a one beat him outen nothin' yet, nossuh.'

"Him an' Mister Stoley doan git along so much neither. Mister Stoley say Mister Rogers aint got no sense, but I notice Mister Rogers got de fines house an' de fines cyar, an' de most money in de bank.'

"I 'member wunst when Zekial's wife Sarah tuck sick wid de pendyceedus. She wuz tuck right sudden lak, and de doctor whut Mr. Rogers hiahs to [like?] arter he hands sez dat she in got to git to de horsepital moughty quick effen she gwine live. Mister Rogers gits out he fine cyar an' dey puts Sarah in de back wid Zekial to hole her hand, an' Mister Rogers driv her to Florence to de horsepital hissef, an' paid de bill in 'vance. Zekial said he paid Mr.

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Rogers up prompt when he shipped he hawgs dis fall. If dere's one thing Mister Rogers doant do, hit is worryfy 'bout whut you owes him. He allus acts supprise lak when you pays him whut you owe him. Lak he wan't spectin hit, but shore glad to git hit. Yessuh, dat shore in one Gawd fearing man. Dis country shore ain't gwine be de same when he gone, nossuh.

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"Old Catty Birch whuts been cookin' for de Rogers for de last forty yeahs caint hardly git aroun' no mo' she is so drawed up wid de roomy-tism. I specks I'll git de job at las'. Leastwise, Mr. Rogers cummed over heah de other day to see me 'bout hit. Sed he jes aint got de heart to hurt Catty's feelings, caze she been so faithful. So, he say he jes git me to hep out, or meck out [lak?] so Catty wouldn't think dey wuz tryin' to git shet er her.

"Mister Rogers he been ovah heah argyfyng wid Mister Stoley 'bout plantin' so much cotton. He tell Mr. Stoley he got to 'versify, whutever dat is. He comed by heah de othah day an' looked at dis shed, an sez kinda pert lak: 'Sam, I wouldn't put stock in a shed lak dat!' An' Mister Stoley he git kinda hot under de collah an' 'low he aint got money to set niggers up in a fine hotel.'

"Effen I ever gits wid Mister Rogers, I'se sho gwine hang on lak a leech tell I die. Yassuh. I'se sho gwine to burrow in wid dat good white man. I done had hit so hard all mah life, an' I'll count mahsef lucky effen I kind spen de res of my few yeahs in peace an' plenty. I 'serves hit, yassuh.'

"I wuz bawn an' raised right near heah fifty yeahs ago, I reckon. I know hits been a powerful long time anyhow. I got [marrried?] jes ex son ez I wuz ole 'nuff, to Susan Codey's boy by 7 her fust husban'. My Abel jes kill hesef wucking fer ole man Collington whut is daid now. I warn him aging wucking in de hot sun so hard, an' he often tell me he got to wuck 'gardless de sun. He cum'd in fer dinner one day, all hot an' mos' panting to death, an' stretch out crost de bed an' tuck de baby in, wid him to try to git him to sleep

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whilst I finished dinner, an' when I went to woke him he didn't answer, an' I call him agin an' say 'Abel! What ail you, I done tole you 'bout goin' out dere in dat broilin' hot sun, sweatin' yosef to death for white buckra whut doan think no more'n you dan dat mule you is ploughin'. Abel he doan say nothin', an' I goes over to de bed where he is layin' wid de baby under he arm an' look at him. He eyes wuz wide open an' so glassy dey skeered me nearly to death, yassuh, an' I sez: 'Abel, honey, whut ail you, say sumthing, git up, speak to me! But I seed he daid. De heat kill 'him, an' den you heahs white folks say a nigger kin stan mos' annything. I reckons dey kin when dey has to.'

I went up to de big house an' call Mr. Collington out an' sez to him: 'You done kill my Abel'. Dats all I could say I wuz so full up. Mister Collington jes kinda laugh an' sez: 'De onliest way to kill a nigger is to hit him in de heel; he haid too hard to hurt him.'

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"I jes stood dere crying, an' I sez: 'Effen you doan believe hit, jes go down to de cabin an' look.' An' he did, an' come back, an' sez: 'I got to git a hand to finish Abel's crop'. Dats all he sed! He wuz jes thinking 'bout he crop. He didn't kere nothin' for po' Abel.'

"I got Brother Whitley whut wuz a good carpenter to meck Abel a coffin outen white pine. He done hit an' never charged me nothin'. [Moughty?] good nigger, Brother Whitley. Deacon in our church too. He got somebody to dig de grave, an' some of de boys hitch up de two hoss wagin, an' carry Abel to he las' restin' place on a Sunday. He died on a Wednesday, but we couldn't git de team dey wuz busy in de fiel' so dats why we had to wait till Sunday to bury him. I sho loved dat boy. I reckon a young girl doant never quite git ovah her fust man.

"I married agin 'bout fo' yeahs arter Abel died. My secon' husban' wuz a good man, leastwise, he wuz good to me. Some sed he runned arter wimmen but effen he did I didn't know nothin' 'bout hit. He wuz good to me wid whut he had. He never struck me a lick in he life, an' he never cuss me even when he wuz drinking. He had a habit er drinkin' a little

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on Sadday night wid some of de boys up to de sto' but he mos' generally cum om home an' went to bed an' sleep hit off, an' not talk much. He wuz a good man to me, an' he died las' yeah. I doant reckon I'll ever marry agin.

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I'se too old for a young man, an' I sho doant want no old man er settin' roun' waiting fer me to bring in rations, nossuh.'

"I jes hopes I kin git on wid Mister Rogers, an' stay on till de las'. I'se sho tried to live a Christian life, an' I allus treated people right ez I could.'

"I'se sho of one thing, when me'n you meets our Gawd face to face, he aint gwine ax, 'Is you white or is you black?' Nossuh. He jes gwine sep'rate de sheep frum de goats. Dats all.'

"Six feet of earth sho gwine meck us all de sam, yassuh.' 'Cose I aint never hankered to sociate wid de white folks. I doan wanna. I jes ax fer right treatment. When we gits up yonder before date glorious throne, de Lawd gwine say to Mister Stoley: 'You aint treated people right. You aint been de kind uv man whut you oughta been.' Den, de Lawd gwine call St. Peter and tell him to show Mister Stoley de do! Yassuh.'

"An' when Mr. Rogers [step?] up for he turn, de Lawd gwine laugh an' say: 'Brother Rogers, I sho is glad to see you. Jes meck yo' sef right at home!'

"Yassuh. Mister, de gwine be a powerful scatterin' er white an' blacks up dere. But de Lawd aint gwine ax is you equal or aint you. He gwine ax is you obeyed his commands. Is you lived 'cording to Gawd's word. Heaven gwine be full of dem dats done right in dis 10 vale er tears, and Hell is gonna be full of dem dat aint. An' dey gwine be plenty whites an' plenty niggers both places.'

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I jes hope me'n you will be dere on dat glorious resurrection mawn, wid de blessings of de Lawd on us both. Maybe I kin git wid my Abel agin, caze he wuz de onliest man whut I ever luv'd [annyhow?]. I'se satisfied dat effen I does hit'll be a happy day, cause Abel won't hafta plough in de hot sun all day up dere before Jesus throne. Thank Gawd dey won't be no landlords dare - we'll be in Abraham's Bosom!"